

## LOVE FIRST: 2012 Summer Messages from 1 John

July 1: "The Antichrist Is Coming:" 1 John 2:18-25

Intro: Loving people is mandatory. Loving stuff, systems, and sin can be a deadly trap. Loving people is Christian. Loving the stuff and the pleasures is antichristian.

Expecting the soon return of Christ is Christian. It is an essential aspect of the teachings of Jesus. It informs our ethics and gives us hope in this life and the next.

Apocalyptic fever that creates calendars for the end of time and suspends necessary duties for life on this planet is antichristian. I have had that fever now and then through the years, and I have watched it come and go like the plague among believers in the Lord Jesus. When the dates that are set prove to be false, it leaves the churches looking foolish and the lost world even more skeptical about our claims concerning Christ Jesus.

I caught the fever back in the 1970s. I really thought that the calendars worked out by Hal Lindsey and others would come to pass. One of the first stories I researched for the Times-Picayune was at my request—a story about the social security checks that one supposed prophet of God had in his possession that required a mark on the forehead to be cashed. I tried and tried to track down that check or a copy thereof until I finally realized that the supposed prophet was nothing but a liar. He had no such check.

There is money to be made in these Bible conferences that focus on the end of all things. People will come to hear you tell how it is all going to end. They will buy your book and go to the movie. Even the secular movies that show the end are wildly popular.

I thought after so many failed dates, including the most recent dates of September 21, 2011, and its companion date this past spring, that the speculation would cease for a while and the fever might pass. But I was mistaken. Setting dates only makes the curious curiouser.

And so I am now resigned to this reality—that preachers who are willing to set dates and act like they know what is coming will sell their books and draw their crowds and make their money even though they stand in a succession of failed predictions that are embarrassments to the church of Jesus Christ.

I will be setting no dates for two reasons. First, I have no clue when Jesus is coming back, but I do expect him soon. Second, Jesus tells me and explicitly, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:7). This is in response to a direct question about the time of the end by his disciples.

### **I. Don't Waste Your Time:** *This is the last hour* (v18)

A. You have so little time to begin with. We live in the last hour. This is the hour of the Messiah's coming.

1. Jesus clearly taught us that he is returning one day and that great trouble would accompany the end of the world. He taught us to keep our chins up, to look to the sky, because our redemption is drawing near.

2. The apocalyptic expectation travels through history like surging waves. When great disaster and trouble come, people suspect that the world is at an end.

3. That expectation of the end is vital to our faith. It informs our behavior in the present hour. It turns our faces toward the future with hope.

4. But the expectation of the coming end of the world should NEVER make us suspend the necessary disciplines of living on this planet and sustaining our friends and family. The instruction that Paul gave, "If a man doesn't work, he shouldn't eat" is found in 2 Thess. 3:10. The letters to Thessalonica are full of instruction about the end of time. Yet they also contain strict instructions to care for the necessities of life.

5. You are a STEWARD of the moments you have to reside on this planet. You have only a few. You must be careful that you use them wisely. A follower of Jesus wants to be USEFUL more so than HAPPY or SUCCESSFUL. It is a life of significance which we seek, a life that is productive for Christ's sake.

B. The antichrist is already present in your world. This spirit works against this very thing. It would exalt other goals and values for your life. It would suggest that you ought to live as if you will live forever or live as if nothing you do matters.

C. People exit the fellowship of believers. This is a reality of life in Christ that has been present from the beginning.

1. The departures are very painful and difficult.

2. They cannot consume our energy and attention.

**II. Don't Buy the Lie:** *Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist (v22)*

A. The lie was prevalent then and now—that Jesus is not the Messiah.

B. The lie is a denial of Jesus Christ himself—his person and work. John knows that Jesus was God in the flesh. He experienced him up close and personal. He saw the empty tomb. He saw the resurrected Lord.

C. Throughout his life he continued to try to convince people in the church and outside of the church that what he saw and heard and felt was real and true. Sometimes people inside the church were not really believers in Jesus, and they would fall away, denying that Jesus was the Messiah. This was a terrible blow to those struggling congregations. John wrote to encourage them, to lift them up, and to reinforce the truth that is in Jesus.

D. The lie continues to this day. It is essentially “antichrist” in its nature. It is against the Messiah, against any Messiah, against Jesus as Messiah.

E. The spirit of antichrist is the message that there is no one coming to help us. There is not forgiveness of sin. There is no judgment, no justice, and no future. There is no God who watches over us with tender love. This is the lie which is antichrist.

F. The teaching about the Messiah is full of hope and faith and a bright future. The antichrist lie is full of despair, cynicism, hopelessness and futility.

G. This lie brings you down, saps your strength, and pitches you into the darkness. When embraced it leaves you alone in the universe, facing your future without hope and your death without remedy.

H. The antichrists have a substitute purpose, meaning, message, and miracle. But none of it works out, and none of it is real. It is all fabricated, made up, fantasy. The miracles are fake. The promises are empty.

I. “No one who denies the Son has the Father” (v23). The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his nature. He is God’s wonderful plan and message for us. John is passionate in his defense of Jesus, his friend and Savior.

**III. Remain in Him:** *See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father (v24).*

A. There is one thing you can do that will prove to be FAITHFUL to God’s work in your life and in his world: remain in Christ.

B. Jesus urged us to do this in John 15:5: ***I am the vine, and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.***

1. I want to remain in him SPIRITUALLY. That is, I want to continue to trust in him alone for my eternal future.

2. I want to remain in him INTELLECTUALLY. I will continue to center my intellect in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and all that it means for my life on this planet.

3. I want to remain in him EMOTIONALLY. That is, I will rely upon him for my purpose and fulfillment. I will not trust in what others say about him but in him and him alone. I will so center my life in him that he is my central love and my central purpose.

4. I want to remain in him RELATIONALLY. This is the most obvious of these dimensions. This means two things for sure:

a. that I stay connected to him as a disciple, that I continue to follow him all the days of my life. It means that I cultivate a personal relationship with the living God through his Son Jesus.

b. that I stay connected to other disciples. Jesus fleshes out this part of remaining in him fully throughout John 15-17. It is all about UNITY in the body of Christ, his church. It is about LOVE for the brothers and sisters. It is about remaining in him.

C. The FRUITFULNESS that he promises becomes my passion. I want to be useful and fruitful. In order to be fruitful I must remain in him. This is the determination of my heart, soul, mind, and strength all the days of my life.